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What Mobile Learning Looks Like

Shelley Kinash, Ron Kordyban and Lauren Hives

For mobile learning, the future is now. The capacity of mobile devices has unleashed the creativity of educators and untethered learning from the traditional use of lecture theatres and classrooms. Many teachers are excited about the idea of mobile learning, but do not know what it means, or what teachers and students do when they are engaged in mobile learning. This article paints true-life pictures of mobile learning as a muse to further inspiration and aspiration.

It is a beautiful, sunny day at the Gold Coast Aquatic Centre and the Australian National Synchronised Swimming Team are training hard for the upcoming London Olympics. One of the swimmers does not know that her wind-down does not match the others' and another athlete does not realise that she has not reached the height of the other swimmers. The coach picks up her 2012-release iPad and films the team. She calls them to the side of the pool and shows the video. Through immediate and specific, visual feedback, the athletes see their errors and comment on their corrections. The coach points out other features of the recorded performance and then sends them back into the pool to do it again. This time, they get it right. The swimmers have just engaged in mobile learning. The recording and instant playback affords them learning opportunities that were not previously possible.

Across the globe, in Liverpool, British taxi drivers are applying a double entendre to mobile learning. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUvoFgkFKdY> <http://www.bloom-eten.org/content/view/full/66/lang,english/>) While on the job, during quiet periods, their taxi becomes their classroom. With the help of a smartphone, drivers are able to access courses and workshops

without forfeiting work time. In the Bloom Liverpool Project, mobile learning takes to the road by bringing the classroom to the drivers. This demonstrates the power of mobile learning to establish non-traditional learning environments and takes advantage of anytime, anywhere learning. In this way, mobile learning provides access to those for whom formal education was previously inaccessible. This model could extend to the elderly, people who work irregular hours, people with disabling conditions, rural learners, single-parent students and many others.

Meanwhile, on campus at Bond University, a small class of postgraduate students are preparing for their tutorial. The lecturer has directed them to meet at the campus café. There, they engage in a dynamic discussion using an iPad whiteboard app to develop concept diagrams. Multi-tasking, they synchronously access learning materials with the Blackboard Mobile Learn app. The use of mobile technology allows the class to go outside the walls of the tutorial room where the informal setting and social properties of coffee promote deeper sharing and discussion.

Directly outside the café, students sit on the manicured lawns overlooking Lake Orr and peruse their courses and subjects, double-checking assignment deadlines and planning their last-minute readings before strolling to their next class. The students are using the Bond Mobile app. From their smartphones, iPads and other handheld devices, students and staff have easy and immediate access to maps, exam schedules, Bond news, emergency information, library services and, of course, their iLearn learning management system (Blackboard). Combined with available

university WiFi services, the students and staff have truly become untethered from their desks and lecture halls.

Mobile learning need not be outside. In a multi-tiered theatre, a student emphatically tweets his opinion about a point raised in the lecture by the professor. The Tweet is immediately responded to by another student who raises a counter-point and adds a link to a website with some statistics from a recent, Australia-wide survey to support her view. The discussion continues as the course Twitter account buzzes to life. The professor has been watching the Tweets with interest and is excited by the student involvement. His next slide adds some further fuel to the debate and he responsively inserts a QR code on the slide, thereby allowing students to use the cameras on their iPads and smartphones to scan the image and immediately access the relevant website. This helps to further stir the coals of the discussion.

A few blocks away, at Varsity College Middle School, a small group of students are creating community clips. Some of the children have demonstrated mastery of a new maths concept, while other students cannot quite understand. The teacher sends the first group out into the hallway with their HP tablets. The children use the stylus to hand-write the equations on the screen and they narrate as they work their way through the problems. They record the screen and their voices as they go. They restart a few times and crop the final video. When they are happy with their lesson, the children post it on eLearn which has as its engine, the Blackboard Learning Management System. The teacher suggests that the struggling children watch the lesson that afternoon. The next day, all of the

children demonstrate concept mastery, having learned through peer modelling.

That evening, as the stars twinkle above Lake Orr at Bond University, the Mobile Creative Learning Inspiration Crew (MCLIC) experiment with QR codes and Blackboard Mobile Learn as they embark upon a treasure hunt around the campus. MCLIC is a program for Bond academics to learn about, experiment with, and collaborate on, mobile teaching and learning. The treasure hunt is a demonstration of mobile technologies, used to provide an engaging learning experience, as the participants collaborate to solve riddles and progress through a series of quizzes. A similar exercise will be repeated in a few months' time, when attendees of a conference, hosted at Bond, participate in an augmented-reality, campus tour.

QR codes containing single-word passwords are hidden around the campus. Upon solving the first riddle, the location of the first QR code is revealed. The QR code contains a password which is used to enter a Blackboard mobile-compatible test. Adaptive release rules in Blackboard ensure that the participants must receive at least 75 per cent for the test before the next riddle is revealed. The activity continues until the participants are directed back to the classroom for the final reveal (or treasure). Not only does this give the participants a chance to get out of their chairs and engage in non-strenuous, physical activity (known to improve learning), but it also allows them to work collaboratively to solve the questions with full access to the information that mobile devices can provide.

The lesson plans and student activities described above are powered by the explosion of education-based applications (ed-apps) which provide low- and no-cost tools for easier and smarter learning. As part of the tsunami of available general apps, learning apps, such as the popular Evernote, allow a one-stop, cloud-based platform for lecture recording, note taking, web page capturing, single-click photo note taking, creation of to-do lists and a host of other tasks. Applications such as Dragon Dictation for speech to text conversion are a time-saver for taking lecture notes or personal, voice memos. Another useful application is

ZigZag, a collaborative whiteboard, which expedites group work and note sharing. With thousands of educational applications to choose from, today's students have an almost limitless choice from which to 'put on their thinking apps'.


Education applications are not solely to help students. Increasingly, teachers have been taking up their devices (and putting down whiteboard markers) to join the fray. At Bond, many teachers include learning apps and other technologies to increase their own productivity and enhance their lectures, including administering real-time class surveys, through web-based programs, and tools such as Socrative, an interactive classroom survey app. Suddenly, the class comes to life as comments, questions, and feedback enrich the classroom dialogue and further engage the learners.

The ever-increasing social media presence has also contributed to the rapid growth of mobile learning. With these 'webs within the Web', the highly developed and intricate channels of communication provide instant and regular forums for content delivery, group discussion, class questions and other, learning-relevant forms of self-expression. Students can pool their collective knowledge, questions and concerns. Teachers can take advantage of this communication back-channel by running Twitter to get live Tweets of student feedback or questions. Setting up subject Facebook pages for an extension to the classroom discussion facilitates content delivery, further engages the students and establishes a presence.

The mobile learning revolution is catalysed by the marriage of cheaper and higher-powered mobile devices. Whether the student is using a smartphone, iPad, laptop, netbook, tablet, palm-held device, iPod or another of the new devices rapidly appearing in the marketplace, there are more features, faster processing speeds, better graphics, more memory and more choice. At the same time, prices are dropping due to technological advances at the production level and a very competitive market. No longer is it a binary choice of desktop or laptop; the either/or mentality has long since been replaced by one of multiplicity. Today's learners have many devices, and each can

be incorporated in the learning process. The roles of educators are to provide guidance as to which devices and applications serve specified, pedagogical purposes and to facilitate multiple means of engagement to meet the learning needs of diverse students.

Among the diverse, contemporary education topics, by far the fastest growing and most talked about, is that of mobile learning. At conferences around the world, workshops about mobile learning are filled to capacity, demand for related training and support among academics has never been higher, and the expectations of the iLearn generation, with their anywhere, anytime access to education, remains the benchmark which schools and universities are scrambling to reach.

At its core, mobile learning is about choices. Beyond the obvious choice of when or where to engage in learning, students can choose the device, platform, applications and social circles by which they study. Teachers are given a similar spectrum of choices, including which applications to include, how to use them, what modes of content delivery and communication tools to offer to their mobile learners, and what elements of the lessons will be in class and which will be offered online. We are witnessing an increasing range of choice, both in terms of learning programs and applications, devices and technologies. The explosive growth of mobile learning will be with us for the long term and it is essential that we adjust and advance our teaching philosophies and methods accordingly. 

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